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INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS
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USEU BRUSSELS
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
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HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
DIA WASHINGTON DC
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
SECDEF WASHDC
CDRUSARPAC FT SHAFTER HI//APCW/APOP//
CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J3/J332/J52//

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000180

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA (BOUCHER, CAMP), SCA/INS AND PRM
STATE ALSO PASS USAID
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA, DCHA/FFP (DWORKEN, KSHEIN), LPA
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA (MORRISP, ACONVERY, RTHAYER, RKERR)
ATHENS FOR PCARTER
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (ADWYER)
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA (WBERGER) AND POL (SBERRY)
GENEVA FOR RMA (NKYLOH, NHILGERT, MPITOTTI)
USUN NEW YORK FOR ECOSOC (D MERCADO)
SECDEF FOR OSD - POLICY
PACOM ALSO FOR J-5

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: Northern Sri Lanka SitRep 16

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1. (SBU) Summary: UN Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes began his visit to Sri Lanka, which will likely bring renewed international attention to the Sri Lankan conflict. Ambassador stressed to Holmes and Foreign Minister Bogollagama that Sri Lankan forces would likely control in a matter of days all territory in the North except the 12 kilometer long safe zone. He pointed out that to avoid mass civilian casualties, it will then be essential for the GSL to exercise restraint and allow diplomacy by Norway and others to persuade the LTTE to release civilians. On February 18, the Government of India called on the Liberation Tiger of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to lay down arms and release civilians trapped by the conflict. The Government of India offered to assist in evacuating civilians, and rejected calls from Tamil Nadu parties to intervene to end the conflict. End summary.

UN U/SYG Holmes Visit

2. (SBU) UN U/SYG for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Sir John Holmes began a three day visit to Sri Lanka on February 19. His visit will include meetings with the Foreign Minister and Defense Secretary on February 19, a visit to the IDP camps in Vavuniya on February 20, and a meeting with President Rajapaksa on February 21. In a lunch with selected Ambassadors hosted by Foreign Minister in Holmes's honor, Ambassador told the Minister and Holmes that the top priority is to persuade the LTTE to release the 70,000 trapped by fighting in the North. Ambassador

commended the government and ICRC for recent progress in evacuating wounded and bringing in needed food and medicine.

13. (SBU) Ambassador noted that Sri Lankan security forces would likely control in a matter of days all the territory in the North except the 12x2 kilometer safe zone. At that point it would be essential for the GSL to exercise patience and restraint to allow diplomacy by Norway and others to persuade the LTTE to release civilians. Any effort by the Sri Lankan military to finish off the remaining LTTE cadres before civilians could first be separated could result in thousands of civilian casualties, he warned. Regarding camps in Vavuniya, Ambassador noted that the UN is reporting it has good access. However, the Sri Lankan military has not allowed the ICRC to monitor the screening and registration of IDPs as they come out of the North, a major issue given reports of disappearances. Indian High Commissioner Prasad echoed Ambassador's concerns. The Minister did not directly address the Ambassador's remarks, but Holmes later indicated that he shared Ambassador's concern about the need for restraint to allow diplomacy to work and the need for ICRC access.

WFP to resume food shipments as early as Saturday

14. (SBU) At the same lunch WFP Coordinator Adnan Khan informed Ambassador that the GSL had made available a tug that could

transport up to 80 tons of food per day from Trincomalee to the safe zone. He expressed hope that the first shipment could be loaded the evening of February 20 for delivery to the safe zone the morning of February 21. He expressed thanks for the U.S. Government's authorization to use U.S. donated food for such shipments.

15. (U) Holmes travels to Vavuniya on February 20 to view humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the North. He will return to Sri Lanka next week to attend the SAARC Foreign Ministers' Summit.

Medical Evacuations

16. (SBU) On February 19-20, the ICRC will undertake a fourth operation to evacuate an additional 400 wounded persons in the safe zone. This will bring total evacuations from the safe zone to Trincomalee to approximately 1600. The ship departing tonight will be the first to ferry in much-needed medical supplies provided by the Government. Evacuated patients are being treated in Trincomalee town and in various government hospitals in Vavuniya and other locations. ICRC reports approximately 100 new wounded are arriving on the safe zone beach every day.

India Calls on LTTE to Release Civilians; Offers Evacuation Assistance

17. (U) On February 18, Government of India External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee discussed Sri Lanka issues in the Indian Lok Sabha Parliament's lower house. He declared that the Government of India was prepared to assist in evacuating civilians in coordination with the Government of Sri Lanka and the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC). Additionally, he rejected internal calls from pro-LTTE parties in Tamil Nadu to intervene to stop the Sri Lankan military's actions, noting, "the Government of India has no instrumentality under which it can force a sovereign government to take a particular action."

Conditions for IDPs

18. (U) UNHCR reports the UN and NGOs are assisting with relief to over 34,000 IDPs from the Vanni now in Jaffna, Vavuniya, and Mannar districts. Approximately 30,000 are in 17 sites (converted schools and transit camps) in the Vavuniya area. The Government announced this week that it will allocate an additional 100 acres to ease overcrowding in the Menik Farms site in Vavuniya.

Medical Crisis in South

¶9. (SBU) A reliable USAID partner with close ties to the Ministry of Health informed the Mission today of an acute degradation of the public health system in northern Sri Lanka. Our source reports that the recent surge of conflict casualties has overwhelmed the public hospitals in Trincomalee, Anuradhapura and Vavuniya. There is an acute lack of preventative and curative supplies at the three locations and no buffer stocks. Qualified staff in sufficient

numbers to respond adequately in the northern are not available. Overflow patients are transported to Kandy and five hospitals in the Colombo area that are struggling with supplies as well. USAID/OFDA is actively working with NGO partners to source several WHO health kits to improve access to hospital supplies in the north. However our source said that the MOH is rigorously restricting international access to hospitals thus far. Ambassador and OFDA Regional Advisor will meet with Minister of Health on February 20 to explore the scope for US assistance and access.

Reported Civilian Casualties

¶10. (SBU) Tamil sources from within the LTTE-controlled area claim 108 civilians killed (including 49 children) and 223 injured on February 18. Approximately 200 persons reached Government-controlled territory on February 18. (Note: Such reports from Tamil sources cannot be confirmed and are frequently exaggerated.)

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